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Royalty, Racism, and Risk

An Analysis of Du Bois's Thesis on Black Masculinity Among Young Black People with Diverse Sexual Identities

Sandra L. Barnes

Department of Sociology, Brown University, Providence, RI, USA
Email: sandra_barnes@brown.edu

Abstract

W. E. B. Du Bois provides a thesis on Black masculinity formation that includes primary traits of this social identity and dynamics that can engender or stymie its development. Yet his framework does not directly reference sexual minorities. This study considers whether and how Du Bois's framework on masculinity is germane to the experiences of young Black people with diverse sexual identities by assessing whether they recount similar tropes and features. The analysis is theoretically informed by a New Millennium Du Boisian Mode of Inquiry and a qualitative analysis for 168 young Black persons who reside in the South. Three themes emerge that adopt, amplify, and adapt dimensions of Du Bois's thesis and demonstrate that key aspects of his framework resonate with Black persons excluded from his original work. Despite nuanced sexual identities, it was common for individuals to espouse Du Bosian tenets associated with Black masculinity such as a protector/provider trope, respectability, racial pride, educational attainment, economic mobility, and self-help as well as concerns about racism. These findings inform research on expectations about masculinity into which many men are generally socialized as well as possible hierarchies among intersecting social identities.

Keywords: Sexual Diversity; W. E. B. Du Bois; Black Masculinity; Social Identities; Racism; New Millennium Du Boisian Mode of Inquiry

Introduction

A strong argument can be made that W. E. B. Du Bois was the quintessential scholar on race, racism, and the Black/African American[1] experience. Yet fewer individuals may be aware of his seminal work on Black masculinity or some of the key characteristics and challenges of this decidedly heterosexual social identity. Informed by a New Millennium Du Boisian Mode of Inquiry (referred to hereafter as NMDMI) (Barnes et al., 2014), this analysis considers Du Bois's framework on Black masculinity for 168 young Black persons who reside in and around the South and who embrace diverse sexual identities. It is important to explain this concept (i.e., diverse sexual identities) at the outset of the study. For example, some individuals here self-identify as members of the LGBTQIA community, others consider themselves straight, and still others chose more varied sexual identities. Moreover, sexual identities could vacillate across time as individuals are picking and choosing self-expressions that feel authentic at this stage in their maturation process.

Equally germane here—many persons identify as masculine. The project goal is to assess whether and how Du Bois's understanding of such dynamics are apparent for this sexually heterogeneous demographic. The implications for studying Black masculinity for such a group are numerous and include considering how views about masculinity may be nuanced, less malleable features of this construct, possible gradations, as well as whether and how individuals explain and justify their varied sentiments. Readers should note that although definitions can vary, in this study, the acronym "LGBTQIA" stands for "Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender/Transsexual, Queer/Questioning, Intersex, and Asexual."[2] Will individuals espouse similar sentiments about Black masculinity as detailed by Du Bois? What does it mean to be a man to them? To be a Black/African American man? Will their experiences, based on the intersection of racial, national, gender, and/or sexual identities, reflect attitudes and actions described by Du Bois? If they differ, how and why?

Research about this population tends to focus on HIV/AIDS or related topics (Arnold et al., 2014; Barnes 2013; Bennett 2013; CDC 2020a, b; Hawkins 2011; Hightow-Weidman et al., 2017; Millet et al., 2012). Although such studies are important, research would also benefit from work about other topics that affect their experiences such as dynamics around masculinity often ascribed to their heterosexual peers (Hunter et al., 2010). Du Bois's framework on Black masculinity did not focus on sexual minorities. This study does not suggest that it should have, but rather examines its possible relevance as a contemporary self-reflective lens for this group (and their peers who may embrace other sexual identities). In this way, the current endeavor may also demonstrate the relevance and robustness of his work for another historically oppressed population. Using qualitative analyses, I assess both views about Black masculinity formation among my research partners as well as whether and how certain traits Du Bois associated with Black masculinity are evident for them. This study has academic and applied implications by considering Du Bois's prodigious work for a group for which it was not intended as well as how factors such as sexuality and race may shape their sentiments.

Experiences of Black People who are Sexually Diverse: A Summary

Much of the medical-related research on persons in this study categorizes them as BMSM (i.e., Black men who have sex with men). Rather than duplicate the thoughtful examination of the implications of this designation by scholars such as Rebecca M. Young and Ilan H. Meyer (2005) and Rachel L. Kaplan and colleagues (2016), I provide comments in the Methodology section and endeavor to use broad, inclusive identifiers in this study. This summary offers a glimpse of some of the challenges and strengths associated with this population—Black people who embrace diverse sexual identities. Individuals in this collective often experience inequities based on their racial, class, national, gender, and sexual identities and/or their intersection (Battle and Bennett, 2005; Choi et al., 2011; Hunter 2010; Jones et al., 2010). Structural inequality specifically due to sexual identity has been linked to homophobia, hate crimes, stereotypes, stigma, and health disparities that are often exacerbated by racism (Barnes 2023, 2013; Bennett 2013; Choi et al., 2011; Hunter et al., 2010). Despite some support from the LGBTQIA community and allies (Balaji et al., 2012), economic and non-economic problems continue (Badgett 2001; Jones et al., 2010).

Both the quality of life and life chances of this population are enhanced by: social policies that promote equity and other protections (Bernstein and Naples, 2015; Corvino and Gallagher, 2012; Pierceso 2013); increased social support (Balaji et al., 2012; Oster et al., 2013); resources to combat poverty and homelessness (Badgett 2001); and, more inclusive religious spaces (Barnes 2023, 2013; Means and Jaeger, 2015). But without effective support systems and coping strategies, Black persons with diverse sexual identities, especially younger persons, are more apt than their peers to: experience physical and emotional problems; internalize negative images; attempt suicide; engage in risky behavior; fail to seek

HIV testing, treatment, and/or disclose their status; or abuse drugs (Arnold et al., 2014; CDC 2020a, b; Peterson and Jones, 2009). However, Black members who embrace sexual diversity are increasingly engaging in self-affirmation and reflection (Barnes 2021; Hunter 2010; Johnson 2011; McQueen and Barnes, 2017). The ability to express their individual and collective voices are central to this process.

A New Millennium Du Boisian Mode of Inquiry (NMDMI)

W. E. B. Du Bois's tireless efforts focus on the "Negro[3] problems." Although he eventually correlates his scholarship and activism with global challenges for people of color, Du Bois performs the earliest, most comprehensive research on the Black experience in the United States, in some instances, to counter prevailing, biased studies (Du Bois 2000a). The research approach and scholarly posture used here is an attempt to continue that tradition. A New Millennium Du Boisian Mode of Inquiry (NMDMI) is both a theoretical framework and a process that reflect "both the spirit and rigor of his original efforts–applied to a contemporary…context…to broaden our queries to consider subjects and sites that have been heretofore rarely investigated" (Barnes et al., 2014, pp. 190-191).

The "new" in NMDMI does not suggest that past work that references Du Bois is "old" but rather that this framework is a charge to reimagine how his work can be applied and extended today to contemporary issues and, in the case of this study, present-day populations. I apply Du Bois's research in an under-studied context because he had "not so carefully mapped the trajectory of Black male sexual representation" (Elam and Taylor, 2007, p. 214). Thus, this study considers W. E. B. Du Bois's thesis on the formation of Black masculinity, some of its primary features, and factors that foster or undermine its development among Black sexually diverse minorities. As well as revitalizing his often over-looked work, it can "expand and extend the Du Boisian legacy…across a plethora of domains…particularly for groups disproportionately affected by social problems such as poverty, classism, sexism, and health inequities [and]…to give voice to those who are often voiceless" (Barnes et al., 2014, pp. 190-191). This approach is detailed in a prior work (Barnes 2021); key features are summarized below.

Employing a NMDMI means, first and foremost, using Du Bois's source material, scholarly and fictional, and his experiences, to study contemporary social issues. As one example, the current analysis uses Du Bois's framework around Black masculinity as a lens to assess the experiences of young Black sexual minorities and their counterparts today. This theoretical framework *and* analytical process often means beginning research where Du Bois's work left off to assess contemporary manifestations of themes and concepts he advanced, such as race prejudice, and their implications. A NMDMI involves examining the potential robustness of his ideas and wisdom as well as his ideological oversights—germane in the current project as I focus on a group of Black persons largely excluded from his original work. One of the best uses of a Du Boisian lens and analytical process involves engaging in intra-group analyses with diverse, historically oppressed groups as a source of descriptive and prescriptive results. As is the case in this project, implementing NMDMI means performing theory tests of key tenets of Du Bois's work in ways that challenge ethnocentrism, investigating intra-group diversity and, employing multidisciplinary and mixed-methodological approaches in innovative ways.

Scholars are already engaged in such inquiry by examining or reexamining Du Bois's origins and foundations as a scholar/activist (Wright II 2002, 2006); often contradictory racial, gender, and sexual politics (Carby 2007; Elam and Taylor, 2007); place as one of the originators of intersectionality (Hancock 2005); work on race, place, and space (Hunter 2013); and, centrality in the formation of the discipline of sociology (Morris 2017; Morris

and Ghaziani, 2005). This scholarly list is not exhaustive and bodes well for a NMDMI. The current project endeavors to reexamine one dimension of Du Bois's work.

Applying a Du Boisian Lens to the Experiences of Young Black People with Diverse Sexual Identities

W. E. B. Du Bois's views about and influence on scholarship around gender, sexuality, respectability politics, and Black masculinity are best found in his writings. Du Bois's scholarship and fiction as well as his own experiences are informative to develop an inventory of characteristics he associates with Black masculinity (Du Bois 1893; 1898; 1899; 2003 [1903]; 1907; 1969 [1908]; 1970 [1915]; 1920; 1926; 1974 [1928]; 1939; 1940; 1952; 1996 [1953]; 1957; 1961; 1969; 2000a, b; 2007a; 2012; 2017). He presents key features of this social identity as well as dynamics linked to racial subordination that can undermine its development. For the sake of parsimony, representative quotes from twenty-two books and articles from Du Bois's prodigious body of writing illustrate his thesis.

Du Bois associates certain attitudes, actions, and capacities with Black masculinity. First, his views on the topic are undoubtedly influenced by his studies of African origins. In addition to documenting unique histories, cultural distinctions, and European exploitation *Black Folk: Then and Now* (1939) describes the centrality of the African family head: "It is the duty of the head of a family to bring up the members thereof in the way they should go…in the knowledge of matters political and traditional…in the ways of loyalty and obedience… with the customs, laws, and traditional observances of the community" (p. 103). For him, a liberal arts education and its varied benefits are central to combat the deleterious effects of slavery and race prejudice for Blacks overall; "From the very first it has been the educated and intelligent for the Negro people that have led and elevated the mass…the college-bred Negro…sets the ideals of the community where he lives, directs its thoughts and heads its social movements… the training of one's home…leaders of thought and missionaries of culture among their people" (Du Bois 2017, pp. 2-3, 11, 17, 21, 30). Yet Du Bois's descriptions of idealized Black masculinity in Philadelphia include descriptions, class-based distinctions and roles; "The best class of Philadelphia Negroes…is a class of caterers, clerks, teachers, professional men, small merchants…as Derham, the Negro physician… very learned…Richard Allen…Absalom Jones…these two were real leaders" (Du Bois 1899, pp. 7, 18). Also, in his fiction *Worlds of Color* (Du Bois 1961), Philip Mansart Wright represents an idealized Black man as described by a female character; "Marian…had never seen a man who so filled her every ideal of what a human being might be…he had manners and intelligence" (p. 208). Per the above narratives, Du Bois's thesis on Black masculinity includes leadership, education, intelligence, economic stability, and respectability norms. It will be important to consider whether and how such tenets he associated with masculinity and, in some instances, with the concept "man" are understood by individuals who may embrace features of masculinity primarily or on the masculine spectrum rather than manhood in the strictest sense.

Du Bois also suggests the stabilizing nature of marriage. For example, in *The Negroes of Farmville, Virginia: A Social Study* (1898), he postulates; "postponing marriage…leads to… illicit sexual intercourse" (p. 11). Moreover, in *Dark Princess* (1974 [1928]), the protagonist Matthew considers its benefits; "Marriage was normal. Marriage stopped secret longings… Once married, he would be safe, settled, quiet" (p. 138). Yet, instability outside of marriage can undermine Black masculinity; "there is undoubtedly in Farmville the usual substratum of loafers and semicriminals who will not work…some able-bodied men who gamble, and fish, and drink" (Du Bois 1899, p. 23). Du Bois finds employment inestimable in general: "It was not until I was long out of college that I realized the fundamental influence man's efforts to earn a living had upon all his other efforts" (2007a, p. 89). However, certain

expressive traits are vital, yet decidedly absent among certain Blacks in general; "At Fisk University character was discussed and emphasized more than scholarship. I knew what was meant and agreed that the sort of person a man was would in the long run prove more important for the world than what he knew or how logically he could think…I have discovered that a large and powerful portion of the educated and well-to-do Negroes… are willing to get 'rich quick' not simply by shady business enterprise, but even by organized gambling and the 'dope' racket" (Du Bois 2007a, pp. 176, 254). The above quotes correlate Black masculinity with honest employment, marital intercourse, and nuclear families.

However, race prejudice could undermine the development of Black masculinity traits that Du Bois values. In *Black Reconstruction in America*, Du Bois (2012) summarizes the impetus for race prejudice; "A determined psychology of caste was built up. In every possible way it was impressed and advertised that the White was superior and the Negro an inferior race" (p. 621). *The Negro* details this oppression; "The advance of freedmen has been too rapid and the South feared it; every effort must be made to 'keep the Negro in his place' as a servile caste. To this end the South strove to make the disfranchisement of the Negroes effective and final" (Du Bois 1970 [1915], p. 134). For Du Bois, resulting outcomes can include promiscuity, laziness, prison, intra-racial violence, and malaise (1899). And just as certain traits are qualifying for Black masculinity, other can be disqualifying. For example, Du Bois posits that Booker T. Washington was the antithesis of Black masculinity as compared to a real man; "Mr. Washington's counsel of submission overlooked certain elements of true manhood…[unlike] the great form of Frederick Douglass, the greatest of American Negro leaders…Mr. Washington's programme practically accepts the alleged inferiority of the Negro races" (Du Bois (1996 [1953]), pp. 43-44, 51). Also, Du Bois's 1933 short story published in the *Crisis*, "The Son of God," offers the Joshua character as an exemplar of idealized Black masculinity who, like Christ, is a leader and martyr who exhibits unconditional love and compassion to the most downtrodden members of an often loveless society (Du Bois 1908 [1969], 1920, 2000a, 2007a). Additionally, the main character in his fiction *Dark Princess* describes experiencing masculinity during dialogue with an ethnically diverse international group of leaders (and in anticipation of an interracial relationship with a princess): "Matthew sat in the dining-room of the Princess of Lutzower Ufer. Looking about, his heart swelled. For the first time since he had left New York, he felt himself a man, one of those who could help build a world and guide it" (Du Bois 1974 [1928], p. 18). These passages place racial pride and uplift, the ability to combat racism, and reflexivity about masculinity as valuable traits. Germane to this study on sexually diverse minorities, Du Bois's own professional and personal experiences are informative about his views on sexuality and Black masculinity:

> Indeed the chief blame which I lay on my New England schooling was the inexcusable ignorance of sex which I had when I went south to Fisk at 17…I actually did not know the physical difference between men and women…This built for me inexcusable and startling temptations. It began to turn one of the most beautiful of earth's experiences into a thing of temptation and horror…I went through a desperately recurring fight to keep the sex instinct in control (Du Bois 2007a, p. 178).

Limited sexual exposure, rape, cohabitation, and marital infidelities suggest tensions around sexuality that likely affected Du Bois's views about sexuality (Carby 2007; Du Bois 1898, 1899, 1974 [1928], 2007a).

Moreover, his engagement with a valued colleague and research collaborative offers suggestions about the implications of violating Du Bois's views on masculinity; "I directed and edited my Atlanta study of 1912, *in abstentia* with the help of my colleague, Augustus

Granville Dill, my student and successor as teacher in Atlanta" (Du Bois 2007a, p. 163). Du Bois describes his initial exposure to homosexuality and a regretful decision:

> In the midst of my career there burst on me a new and undreamed of aspect of sex. A young man, long my disciple and student, then my co-helper and successor to part of my work, was suddenly arrested for molesting men in public places. I had before that time no conception of homosexuality. I had never understood the tragedy of an Oscar Wilde. I dismissed my co-worker forthwith, and spent heavy days regretting my act (Du Bois 2007a, p. 179).

Based on the above quote, it is unclear whether Dill's homosexuality or arrest (or both) cause Du Bois's decision to terminate him and/or whether Dill's familiarity or academic acumen (or both) result in Du Bois's subsequent contrition.

More recent research suggests that Dill's firing was not necessarily due to his sexuality, but more likely related to a history of poor work performance and Du Bois's concerns about the potential negative consequences of working with someone arrested for public homosexual sex. Per Marcus Brooks and Earl Wright's (2021) groundbreaking case study on Dill, his ineffectiveness as business manager for *The Crisis*, evidenced by declining subscriptions, and possible mental health challenges, rather than his arrest, precipitated Dill's termination. Their premise is supported by Du Bois's encouraging correspondence to his colleague, "Forget the little incident [i.e., his arrest] that has worried you so out of all proportion to its significance. It has nothing at all to do with my action" (Brooks and Wright, 2021, p. 7). George Chauncey (1994) supports this premise that Dill's "firing was likely not a direct response to his arrest alone" (p. 437). Yet Du Bois's decision suggests that, despite Dill's notable abilities as a researcher and teacher, reputational concerns about his sexual indiscretion, in part, disqualified Dill as a viable academic partner and a model for Black masculinity (Carbado et al., 2002). In addition, Du Bois's decision to distance himself from Dill, involvement during the Harlem Renaissance, close engagement with closeted son-in-law Countee Cullen, and circumspect ties to openly gay artist, writer, and philosopher Alain Locke minimally imply cautiousness about homosexuality (Stewart 2018; Stokes 2007).[4]

Overall, a more nuanced assessment of their relationship requires a discussion about Dill's disqualification, not based on his sexuality, but rather due to his other violations of Du Bois's view of masculinity (i.e., Dill's lack of leadership, good citizenship, sobriety, and sexual wholesomeness). These issues threatened Du Bois's objectives for racial uplift, because they violated Black respectability. Thus, these challenges are related to outcomes *associated with* Dill's sexuality and *not exclusively based on* his sexuality, but rather on how Dill's sexuality influenced his behavior. Yet Dill's contributions to Black Public Sociology after 1928 via knowledge production and knowledge dissemination about racial pride, racial uplift, and combatting racism through Black placemaking, Black art, and conversing with publics position him as a model of Black masculinity, in particular, and Black excellence, in general (Brooks and Wright, 2021; Chauncey 1994).

Several caveats are in order. This analysis does not suggest that Du Bois's writing is consciously gendered, but rather that, although he was usually writing to a broad audience of both men and women, in some instances, certain statements were specifically about Black men. Nor am I suggesting that Du Bois necessarily originates these traits around Black masculinity, but rather that his work emphasizes them. Also, the above framework is not exhaustive, nor does it replace Du Bois's (1898) four-part overall typology on the broader Black experience based largely on class and morality traits. Rather it should be considered a guiding theoretical framework. I contend that Du Bois's framework is

potentially instructional here given his extensive studies on the Black experience and Black masculinity, and the possible applicability of his efforts today. Based on the above summary, Du Bois associates Black masculinity with the following traits and/or capacities: a liberal arts education; a protector/provider trope; respectability and ethics; race pride and confidence and racial uplift; conscientiousness; employment and hard work; leadership in both the Black family and community; truthfulness; good citizenship; frugality; sexual wholesomeness and sobriety; the desire for upward mobility; reflexivity about Black masculinity; and, self-sufficiency. And just as such traits can "qualify" Black males in terms of a Black masculine trope, violation of these same traits, and as some scholars suggest, homosexuality, can disqualify them (Brooks and Wright, 2021; Carbado et al., 2002; Chauncey 1994; Stewart 2018; Stokes 2007).

But how could Du Bois's ideology around Black masculinity loom in the lives of Black sexual minorities? Both Black Feminism and Queer of Color (QOC) theory help explain this tendency and justify this study. Just as Du Bois (1899, 1996 [1953]) explains how double consciousness resonates in the *souls* of Black folk, central tenets of his thesis about Black masculinity are embedded in this consciousness as part of the same socialization processes. As such, dimensions of this ideology are part of how many Black males understand what it means to be African American in the United States. Also, perks and penalties associated with abiding by these structured processes exist in families, schools, religion, the legal system, etc. (Balaji et al., 2012; Barnes 2013; Bernstein and Naples, 2015; Carbado 1999; Choi et al., 2011; Collins 2004; Corvino and Gallagher, 2012; Means and Jaeger, 2015). Yet, applying Patricia Hill Collins' (1990) observation in *Black Feminist Thought*, as outsiders within, "people who are oppressed usually know it. […] the knowledge gained at the intersection of race, class, and gender oppression provides the stimulus for crafting and passing on the subjugated knowledge of a…culture of resistance" (p. 11). This analysis seeks to illumine this unique knowledge gained by young Black people who embrace diverse sexual identities. Moreover, QOC theory describes the historic, systemic roots of this dynamic:

> African American culture has historically been deemed contrary to the norms of heterosexuality and patriarchy…heteronormativity is not simply articulated through intergender relations, but also through the racialized body…. Marking African Americans as such was a way of disenfranchising them politically and economically… [and the impetus was] anxiety about the nonheteronormative practices of African Americans, coding those practices as proof of the 'uncivilized, degraded, undisciplined, and…wholly unchristian ways' of the slaves (Ferguson 2004, pp. 20-21, 86).

In part, Du Bois's thesis was both a response to these negative structural forces and a call for African American agency and respectability in ways he deemed most likely to uplift the race (Carby 2007).

I use the above theoretical framework and a qualitative analysis to consider whether and how Du Bois's conceptualization of Black masculinity manifests for a cadre of young Black people with diverse sexual identities. Moreover, this study proposes to illustrate how an original thesis from Du Bois's work (i.e., his thesis on Black masculinity) can be studied using a NMDMI. The three research queries—What does it mean to be "a man" to you? What does it mean to be "African American/Black" to you? and What one piece of good advice would you give an African American/Black man like yourself?—are designed to illumine their experiences to assess the robustness of Du Bois's model beyond the gender and sexuality dichotomies on which he focused. Findings are expected to be applicable to

the sample as well as their peers with similar profiles and help address the paucity of studies about their experiences beyond a focus on HIV.

Data, Methods, and Analytical Approach: Voices of the Study Partners

Data and Demographics

A sample was drawn from a group of young Black persons with diverse sexual identities—many who self-identify as Black, male, gay, and masculine—who participated in an intensive prevention program sponsored in a medium-sized metropolitan city in the South. The program site was selected because research shows a disproportionate number of young Black men who have sex with men (BMSM) from the South contract HIV/AIDS (CDC 2020a, b). The program was designed to foster healthier decision-making to combat HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis C among persons in this population ages eighteen to twenty-four years old.[5] In addition, the prevention was created to promote conversations that cultivate healthier sexual, spiritual, and racial identities. Thus, central to the initiative was the importance of soliciting and documenting the experiences of participants. Recruitment occurred using snowball sampling via social media, fliers, word of mouth, and community partners. Based on grant requirements, participants represented the pre-determined selection criteria of race (Black or African American), age (eighteen to twenty-four years old), self-identified sexual identity (men who have sex with men (MSM)), and self-identified negative HIV status.

Although inclusion of HIV-positive individuals would have added another important dimension to this study on Du Bois's views around topics such as sobriety, sexual wholesomeness, and temperance, per the grant goals, the prevention program was specifically developed to combat the likelihood of contracting HIV; so negative HIV status prior to participation was required. Interested candidates were screened for eligibility. Demographic data were captured such as age, employment status, gender, sexual orientation, education level, and race and ethnicity, as well as questions to gauge awareness of HIV resources and views about subjects such as sexuality, race, gender, and religion. This study is based on responses from these data.

This analysis is based on two cross-sectional data sources, a survey completed thirty days after the program's end by one hundred and sixty-eight (n=168) participants between 2016-2019 (the survey response rate was 47.3%), as well as twenty-five (n=25) tape-recorded, in-depth, follow-up interviews from this same group between 2018-2019.[6] The survey consisted of closed and open-ended questions completed online or via hardcopy; only open-ended questions were posed during the forty-five-minute to one hour in length interviews. Participants receive $50 gift cards at program end and upon completion of surveys thirty days later. The program location, and hence the sample, were chosen based on documented health disparities in this population and in the southern region. Some sample variability exists given that some respondents are college students (refer to Table 1) from other parts of the country. However, the sample is not random and the results are not generalizable to the entire United States or the larger Black queer population. Moreover, I cannot determine whether similar results would emerge using other cities, states, or national data. However, such broad generalizability is not the goal here. The data reflect a convenience sample in that it was garnered from an existing prevention; it is also intentional because one of the program goals was to collect this information. Overall, the merits of the sample (i.e., justification of its use) and subsequent results lie in the value of participants; to share their voices about sexuality, gender, and masculinity beyond the usual focus on HIV; and to consider their experiences as a test of a Du Boisian lens about masculinity (as individuals with diverse sexual identities) as informed by race, racial issues

Table 1. Study Participants' Demographic Information by Education Level

	High School	Community College or Trade School	College and beyond	Total
Race*				
Black/ African American	85 (97.7%)	15 (100%)	65 (98.5%)	165 (98.2%)
Latinx/Hispanic	7 (8%)	0 (0%)	4 (6%)	11 (6.5%)
Other (White, Native American, Asian)	14 (18.7%)	0 (0%)	5 (9.8%)	19 (13.7%)
Gender				
Male	78 (94%)	15 (100%)	66 (98.5)	159 (96.4%)
Transgender	4 (4.8)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	4 (2.4%)
Other (Female, Nonbinary)[+]	1 (1.2%)	0 (0%)	1 (1.5%)	2 (1.2%)
Total (N)	83	15	67	165
Sexual Identity				
Heterosexual	26 (38.8%)	0 (0%)	14 (26.9%)	40 (29.9%)
Gay[+]	25 (37.3%)	12 (80%)	30 (57.7%)	67 (50%)
Unsure	5 (7.5%)	1 (6.7%)	1 (1.9%)	7 (5.2%)
Total (N)	67	15	52	134
Age				
18–21	54 (62.8%)	3 (20%)	29 (43.3%)	86 (51.2%)
22 and older	32 (37.2%)	12 (80%)	38 (56.7%)	82 (48.8%)
Total (N)	86	15	67	168
Employment				
Employed full–time	22 (25.6%)	11 (73.3%)	24 (35.8%)	57 (33.9%)
Employed part–time	18 (20.9%)	2 (13.3%)	12 (17.9%)	32 (19%)
Unemployed	46 (53.5%)	2 (13.3%)	31 (46.3%)	79 (47%)
Total (N)	86	15	67	168
Relationship Status				
Never married (single)	58 (67.4%)	9 (60%)	47 (70.1%)	114 (67.9%)
Other	28 (32.6%)	6 (40%)	20 (29.9%)	54 (32.1%)
Total (N)	86	15	67	168
Residence				
Home/Apartment	32 (37.2%)	6 (40%)	24 (36.9%)	62 (37.3%)
Other	54 (62.8%)	9 (60%)	41 (63.1%)	104 (62.7%)
Total	86	15	65	166

Key: *Respondents who identified as biracial or multiracial could select multiple racial and/or ethnic options; so 20.2% of respondents self-identify as multiracial or multiethnic. [+]One participant self-identified as female/lesbian and one person as non-binary. The majority of individuals are masculine-identifying. The following variables had missing responses at the time of survey completion [Sexual orientation (n=34), Gender (n=3), and Residence (n=2)]. N=168.

(as Blacks or African Americans and as residents in the South) and their intersecting social identities.

Describing Diverse Sexual Identities in This Study

The use of designations such as MSM has received attention and criticism by scholars outside epidemiological circles germane to this present study that includes sexual identity identifiers. Young and Meyer (2005) provide several critiques of categories such as MSM and WSW. For example, they contend that such categories fail to capture the complexities of social identities; often minimize and erase diverse sexual and social identities and the

corresponding realities of people's daily lives; can overshadow the diversity of health needs of persons not reflected in such groupings; and can overlook diverse forms of interaction and intimacy that such terms exclude. Kaplan and colleagues (2016) provide a similar critique about conflating MSM with female transpersons. These types of critiques about the use of binaries and reductionist categorizations point to the need for inclusive descriptions that recognize and honor the multifaceted nature of social identities and experiences. Additional comments about my research partners are in order. Although participants embrace a range of identities, the vast majority of them are masculine-identifying persons. As noted in Table 1, over 96% of individuals identify as male, the remaining group identify as transgender (four persons), female/lesbian (one person), or non-binary (one person). This means that the study is more specifically representative of Black queer persons, broadly defined, who identify primarily with masculinity or on the masculine spectrum. Persons could define themselves across an array of identities—including, but not limited to cis-gender, binary, non-binary, transgender— and still embrace tenets associated with masculinity.

Individuals in this analysis did not seem averse to the concept BMSM (i.e., Black men who have sex with men) as described in the prevention program grant, because they had opportunities to determine and describe their own identities in terms such as African American, multi-racial, Black, multi-ethnic, transgender, female, male, queer, gay, bisexual, straight, gender non-conforming, and, in several cases, human. Just as some scholars find the use of concepts like MSM problematic, others reject categories and labels in general. My study partners had opportunities during and after program involvement to self-define their various identities. The vast majority did. Their self-definitions, when available, are provided in thumbnail descriptions with their quotes. Readers will note that varied descriptions are used here (i.e., Black people with diverse sexual identities, Black sexual minorities, Black members of the LGBTQIA community, sexually diverse, queer, sexually fluid, Black males, individuals, and persons) as I describe my research partners. Thus, the goal is not to mis-identify, erase, mis-gender, or essentialize people, but rather to document the constellation of concepts used as they describe themselves that can vary across time as individuals choose to self-identify as well as feel agentic to change these markers (Kaplan et al., 2016; Young and Meyer, 2005).

Sample Demographics

As presented in Table 1, most respondents are Black/African American (98.2%); 20.2% also self-identify as multiracial or multiethnic. Most self-identify as male; about 50% self-identify as gay. Almost 30% of respondents have had sex with other men, but consider themselves straight. Certain persons didn't reveal their sexual orientations during the survey and/or interviews. Educational outcomes are as follows: high school (51.2% or eighty-six respondents); community college (8.9% or fifteen);[7] and, bachelor's degree and beyond (39.9% or sixty-five). Also, 33.9% work full-time and most are unmarried (67.9%). Their average age is twenty-two years old.

This analysis is based on the following three questions asked on both the survey and during interviews: What does it mean to be "a man" to you? What does it mean to be "African American/Black" to you? and What one piece of good advice would you give an African American/Black man like yourself? The questions are purposefully broad to elicit varied responses without leading participants; references to Du Bois or his thesis weren't made. Thus, if certain views emerge that reflect Du Bois's thesis about Black masculinity, it would suggest that his framework continues to resonate today—even among sexual minorities and their counterparts. Surveys and interviews were transcribed by a trained

transcriber and reviewed by this writer, the lead investigator, and the program evaluator. The goal is not generalizability to the young Black population with diverse sexual identities, but to document their experiences and views about Black masculinity. Yet these results may be broadly applicable to this collective and inform academic and applied literature.

Analytical Approach

Two qualitative analyses were performed. First, Nvivo 12 Pro was used to identify word frequency used by respondents. This initial stage was important to efficiently uncover whether respondents used specific terminology from Du Bois's thesis (e.g., education, leadership, intelligence, strength, marriage, frugality, upright, pride, or related concepts such as "school" (instead of education or college-bred), "strong" (instead of strength), racism (instead of race prejudice), honesty (instead of character) or informal phrases such as "taking care of business" (instead of conscientiousness)). These emergent concepts also became the codes used during the next analysis phase. Content analysis was then used to identify emergent themes and patterns in responses (Barnes 2021; Hsieh and Shannon, 2005; Hunter 2010; Krippendorf 1980; Mayring 2021; Neuendorf 2016). The data were systematically examined by hand using two primary processes: open-coding, in which broad concepts were categorized and labeled, and axial coding, in which connections between these concepts and possible themes were assessed. Several steps were taken. Line-by-line coding was used to identify common verbiage; this coding was informed by the words most frequently uncovered during the Nvivo analysis. This process allowed me to identify frequently used phrases (for example, uncover specific ways persons described leadership as a feature of Black masculinity). I continued this process as a next stage of capturing and confirming the most common concepts and patterns used by respondents to discuss Black masculinity.

Next, the data were examined further based on key Du Boisian phrases such as double consciousness to illumine possible patterns not as directly apparent during prior analyses such as: references to intersections of racial, gender, national, and/or sexual identities; experiences and examples; and, views that contrast or extend Du Bois's tenets about Black masculinity. Representative quotes were also identified during this phase. After themes emerged, concepts and phrases most associated with each of them were tabulated in Nvivo to empirically quantify theme salience. Validity and reliability aren't common criteria for qualitative analyses; yet the multiple data analyses used here provide confidence in the regularly occurring concepts and themes. Findings, including themes and representative quotes, are presented below. Pseudonyms are used; self-defined sexual identities are included when provided by respondents.

Findings

Examining Du Bois's thesis on Black masculine formation for the experiences of young Black people with diverse sexual identities results in the following three themes: (1) Adopting Du Bois: We are Royalty; (2) Amplifying Du Bois: Navigating Racism, Stigma and Stereotypes; and, (3) Adapting Du Bois: Self-Reflections and Risk. These three themes suggest that certain individuals recount many of the same tenets and challenges associated with Du Bois's views on Black masculinity. Yet others understand the topic in decidedly different ways. However, the three themes are not completely mutually exclusive because some persons make linkages across several of them (Hunter 2010). Yet themes are distinct in their *emphasis* on certain topics and concepts. In "Adopting Du Bois" (about 22% of persons fell within this theme), respondents provide narratives on sentiments about ethno-racial royalty, Pan-African identity, and racial pride. By

"Amplifying Du Bois," they emphasize navigating racism, stigma, and stereotypes that make their racial or intersecting social identities more salient (50% of persons fell here). Lastly, respondents who adapt Du Bois's thesis reflect on risk and marginalization Black sexual minorities experience (28% of persons fell here). Yet in each theme, individuals provide varied definitions of masculinity and/or Black masculinity. Each theme is summarized below.

Theme 1. Adopting Du Bois: "We Are Royalty"

Participants associated with this theme have positive self-images that emphasize ethno-racial royalty and racial pride (Du Bois 1939). They don't discount challenges due to their intersecting, often marginalized social identities, but believe their cultural heritage provides capacities and fortitude to weather societal storms. As encouraged in Du Bois's *Darkwater* (1920), they define themselves, not by White societal standards, but based on their own self-definitions:

> Is it better because Europeans are better, nobler, greater, and more gifted than other folk? It is not. Europe has never produced and never will in our day bring forth a single human soul who cannot be matched and over-matched in every line of human endeavor by Asia and Africa…. Nefertari, Mohammed, Rameses and Askia, …the result would be the same; but we cannot do this because of the deliberately educated ignorance of White schools by which they remember Napoleon and forget Sonni Ali (Du Bois 1920, pp. 39-40).

This initial theme differs from its two subsequent counterparts because it includes individuals who have adopted Du Bois's challenge to Negroes to maximize their potential as modeled by both their progenitors and the supposed "best" of their race (Du Bois 1920, 2007b). First, a cadre of persons find links to an African identity salient. For example, Chester, a twenty-one-year-old unemployed high school graduate who identifies as gay, associates masculinity in general with both mental acuity and ethical qualities. However, his definition for Black masculinity is more nuanced; "Being a man is to be strong-minded and honest…being an African American man means to carry the weight of my ancestors with me every day, [but] I am strong-minded and influential." As well as noting the historicity of this social identity, Chester's comment reflects the spirit of Du Bois's admonition to represent the race well as exemplified by "the best class of" Negroes (Du Bois 1899, p. 7, 1920, 2007b). Chester posits that his intestinal fortitude as an African American man enables him to actualize this daily responsibility. And like Du Bois, Chester's comment links Black masculinity to Black respectability that does not seem to be dependent on his sexuality (Brooks and Wright, 2021). Chester is always cognizant of and willingly embraces this duty. Donnie, a twenty-eight-year-old full-time employed college graduate (sexual identity unknown), correlates biology and masculinity; Black masculinity is linked to Africa; "A man is an XY chromosome. Being African American means being of African descent—an African king." Donnie's comment suggests both a Pan-African identity and racial royalty motif as sources of identity and pride.

 Drew, a twenty-three-year-old full-time employed, gay community college graduate, acknowledges his racial identity and connectedness such that being Black means; "to be of African descent…from Africa." He continues; "Yes, I know where I'm from and things affecting the Black community." The remark also reflects a variant of double consciousness, as Drew identifies with both Africa and America, but the latter identity due to its ties to the broader Black community (Du Bois 1899, 1996 [1953]). Similarly, Marvin, a twenty-

six-year-old queer, full-time employed college graduate, connects masculinity to a traditional protector/provider trope, but his racial identity to Africa:

> This is a royal, phenomenal race to be a part of, it's a sacred passage. Black men must be safe, love yourself because you're worth having a long, healthy, meaningful life…A man takes care of business, gets things done, and protects self and others…I wish I would have been more careful who I trusted and to be very aware of my surroundings. [In the past] I wish I had more pride and self-care.

Marvin's regal terminology (i.e., "royal" and "sacred") suggests a respectability motif as well as strategies to foster a positive self-identity and quality of life. Alluding to possible Black masculinity deformation, age and experience have made him more discerning about past imprudent decisions and failing to love himself unconditionally. In the above remarks, Chester, Donnie, Drew, and Marvin embrace varied sexual identities, but espouse aspects of an ethno-racial sense of belonging informed by royalty symbolism that privileges their national and racial identities (Du Bois 1920). They don't explain the impetus for these sentiments but tend to associate them with being adaptive and resilient.

As illustrated by the following remarks from Keifer, Tim, Cameron, Lonnie, Cory, Benedict, and Prince, another dimension of this theme references pride in accomplishments by Blacks that often go unrecognized or that have been appropriated by Whites. Keifer, a twenty-eight-year-old general studies major and singer who identifies as gay, recognizes Black contributions to society, the conscientiousness of Black males, and bonds in the Black community:

> To be Black in America or African American… Is to be a part of a culture that originated what it means to be American within this country. Without this particular group, America would not exist today. To understand and be aware of that is something really special for me.… in the development of cities, there wouldn't be a lot of what we see today if it were not for the labor and the footwork by African Americans…We were trailblazers…We were the first to actually come up with things such as the street or traffic light and the pencil sharpener…It means I am part of a group or a community of people who are very distinct in terms of creativity, who are very ambitious when it comes to innovation, and are also very proud of who and where they came from.

Keifer's comment above references accomplishments like John Love's invention of the pencil sharpener and Garrett Morgan's invention of the three-position traffic signal. Moreover, his observation parallels Du Bois's (1970 [1915]) following comment:

> Already in poetry, literature, music, and painting the work of Americans of Negro descent has gained notable recognition. Instead of being led and defended by others, as in the past, American Negroes are gaining their own leaders, their own voices, their own ideals. Self-realization is thus coming slowly, but surely to another of the world's great races (p. 138).

Similar to Du Bois, Keifer's remark points to both the agentic nature and burgeoning group consciousness of the race of which he is knowledgeable and proud. And according to twenty-three-year-old Tim; "Being a man means standing for what feels true to you while being a leader to those around you… I knew who I was before…Black men have flavor! We must be fearless, be great." Tim, a high school graduate, employed part-time, and self-

identified as gay, associates masculinity, in general, with Du Boisian traits such as leadership and honesty. Self-aware of his own racial pride and the uniqueness (i.e., "flavor") of Black masculinity, Tim ascribes to other Du Boisian features of Black masculinity such as respectability and courage (Du Bois 1899, 2003 [1903], 1969 [1908], 1996 [1953]). As well as associating leadership with masculinity in general, Cameron, an eighteen-year-old gay college student, attempts to explain the source of systemic problems for Blacks:

> Being a man means I'm strong and a leader and everything that falls under that…Being an African American man means stuff will be hard for you, but I'm happy to be Black, we poppin', to be honest, and I love our culture… every other race tries to take little things from us and make it like it was theirs. We're like the blueprint, to be honest, for every other culture.

Cameron uses Black/African American interchangeably. He describes what he believes are intentional efforts by Whites to appropriate Black culture and achievements. For him, Black culture has and continues to be at the center of societal progress. Moreover, Cameron's comment harkens back to the following Du Boisian (1970 [1915]) summation; "The character of the Negro race is the best and greatest hope; for in its normal condition it is at once the strongest and the greatest of the races of men" (p. 146). Twenty-eight-year-old Lonnie embraces being gay and uses royalty terminology to offer both a suggestion and self-affirmation; "Be proud of who you are. Protect your crown…I'm more empowered." For him, racial pride should result in self-care and healthy decision-making (Arnold et al., 2014).

For several individuals, personal pride should automatically emerge as a feature of Black masculinity. Cory, a twenty-six-year-old full-time employed college graduate (queer sexual identity), directly associates masculinity with himself; "To be a man means…to be me…I would tell Black men to be proud of yourself no matter what." Cory and other participants associated with this theme espouse diverse sexual identities, yet their comments consistently illustrate a comfortability in themselves as Black and/or African American. For twenty-two-year-old Benedict, who considers himself bisexual, Black masculinity is often challenged by negative social forces, yet he feels empowered to push back:

> Being Black means I'm a human being. I have a free mind. I have a free spirit. I have the power to think for myself, speak for myself, without being judged or criticized…at the same time, the world tries to limit my power…You know, to speak up, being yourself is hard.

Benedict's understanding of Black masculinity deviates from Du Bois's (2017) stance that reflects patriarchy and heteronormativity, but rather focuses on humanness as a primary identity. Yet certain qualities he describes resemble traits Du Bois (2003 [1903]) references in *The Negro Church*; "these men [clergy] are all noteworthy as upright, able men, eloquent speakers and notable leaders and organizers…they are the ones who are doing the work and leading the best elements of the Negroes" (p. 202). For Benedict, personal agency (i.e., "power" and "freedom"), courage, and wisdom are liberating and have enabled him to navigate a society that often judges and marginalizes Black men.

Lastly, Prince, a twenty-year-old psychology college student, is gender fluid. He embraces a nuanced version of a protector/provider trope with an unexpected impetus:

> Being a man in my eyes is someone who knows their role as the protector and as a guardian, but can also play the role of the caretaker and the nurturer… somebody who

can play any role that needs to be played…To be a Black man in America means that you are always at war in a lot of different ways…But to be a Black man is to be someone who is powerful, but not in the classical sense of powerful. Powerful in their silence. Powerful in their quiet strength… Someone whose presence in itself is calming. It's something that lets you know that you're being cared for, that you're protected, that you don't have anything to worry about, that you're free to be who you want to be because there's always going to be somebody who is going to stand guard and let you do that.

Prince alludes to systemic problems (i.e., being "at war" and the need to "stand guard") that can undermine Black males but espouses both androgyny and a non-traditional form of power (i.e., "quiet strength") based on unconditional care for others. For him, Black masculinity means possessing this intrinsic trait to enhance spaces one enters and people one engages akin to Alaine Locke's "quiet dimensions of Black humanity" (Stewart 2018, p. 877).

In sum, the variable sexual identities of young Black people with diverse sexual identities here do not appear to preclude some persons from espousing traditionally masculine expectations linked to strength and a protector/provider trope. Their views also provide counternarratives to unfavorable depictions of them (Collins 2004; Ferguson 2004). Equally important, whether the impetus is Africa, internal, or the result of connects to the Black community, persons associated with this theme have adopted a sense of pride and self-respect based on ethno-racial or Pan-African identities and/or a royalty motif that help them positively navigate society.

Theme 2. Amplifying Du Bois: "Navigating Racism, Stigma, and Stereotypes"

The second theme includes narratives that tend to espouse heteronormative views about *masculinity* in general. However, this theme is distinct based on its more detailed sentiments about Black masculinity that emphasize racial challenges. Young Black persons who embrace varied sexual identities describe experiences navigating racism much like the race prejudice Du Bois experienced and researched decades ago (Du Bois 1970 [1915], 1920, 1974 [1928], 1940, 1996 [1953], 1957, 1961, 1985, 2000b, 2007a, b). Their reflections often parallel the following well-known remark on double consciousness; "the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second sight in this American world" (Du Bois 1996 [1953], p. 5). Although respondents may mention racism in the two other themes, individuals here emphasize this social problem such that their racial identity as Black is often privileged over their other social identities (Hunter 2010).

For example, twenty-three year-old college student Micah, who self-identifies as straight, describes racism and his use of education as a tool to navigate oppression; "There's a lot of racism that we have to deal with…As a Black man, I think these two correlate. I think it's choosing your life and choosing how to overcome certain stigmas and stereotypes… Being Black, it's actually an advantage…because of what we've been through, there's more of a kinship…I've always been proud of the determination I've had, the perseverance, you know, taking my education seriously…my accomplishments are around education and academics." Micah doesn't dismiss the existence of racism, stigma, and stereotypes, but believes, like Du Bois (2007a), that his liberal arts education and agency enable him to better negotiate them. Moreover, he suggests that intra-racial connectedness and prudence can emerge from these negative encounters.

Brad (18-year-old, unemployed, high school graduate, gay) responds similarly; "Due to the fact that we are Black, they already want to put us in a box of stereotypes. It's kind of like

we're already seen as lazy. On TV, we're already depicted as lazy or [people who] just like chicken and eat watermelon. I'm very smart, very intelligent…there's more to us than just the negative things you think." Negative labels and televised images minimize positive capacities Brad knows that he and other Black men possess. His comment parallels the divisiveness of racism described in *Darkwater*:

> This theory of human culture and its aims has worked itself through warp and woof of our daily thought with a thoroughness that few realize. Everything great, good, efficient, fair, and honorable is 'White'…and the devil is 'Black'…a White Man is always right and a Black Man has no rights which a White man is bound to respect… And then—the Veil…There is Hate behind it, and Cruelty and Tears…one sees blood and guilt and misunderstanding. And yet it hangs there, this Veil, between Then and Now, between Pale and Colored and Black and White—between You and Me (Du Bois 1920, pp. 44, 246).

Logan, an eighteen-year-old unemployed college student, continues this same narrative; "Being a man means to be fine, masculine, and strong. And being African American means being second place, but not by choice…Take your time and learn for yourself. Do not look or listen to anyone. I enjoy mingling with other gay men. It feels different as a Black gay male." Logan affirms his masculinity in general and mentions idealized Du Boisian (1961) traits (i.e., "strong"). However, he recognizes a racial hierarchy in the United States that he believes squelches the agency of African Americans. Yet support from other Black gay men and self-reflection enable him to be resilient much like the "peculiar hopefulness" Du Bois found among Farmville Negroes (1898, p. 38). Also, Logan's challenge to males like him to reject second class citizenry due to racism broadly hearkens to Du Bois's (1996 [1953]) critique of Booker T. Washington's "silent submission to civic inferiority such as is bound to sap the manhood of any race" (p. 54). Like Du Bois, for Logan, such acquiescence is not indicative of being strong, Black, and masculine.

Some individuals here tend to espouse a protector/provider trope celebrated by Du Bois (1898) in general, but a more nuanced view of Black masculinity. Amari, a twenty-two-year-old part-time employed high school graduate who self-identifies as gay, comments; "As a Black man, don't let your sexuality define who you are. Being a man means being a responsible provider but being a Black man means being talented and shaded." Amari's colloquialism hearkens to both double consciousness and racial hierarchy where African American/Black men are gifted, but experience negativity or "shade." Amari also seems comfortable embracing a masculine spectrum where one's masculinity is not overshadowed by one's sexuality. Moreover, twenty-year-old Prince, a psychology major who is gender fluid, describes discrimination and Black men's experiences: "Whether it be covert or out in the open, you're always trying to protect yourself from someone or something that wishes harm against you simply for the fact that you're alive…To be a Black man in America is to build something substantial for themselves but, at the same time, is always being undermined by the Other in whatever form that Other shows up." Prince associates Black masculinity with conscientiousness, but describes systemic forces (the "Other") intentionally designed to undermine and, in some instances, cause harm. Prince also suggests continually being on alert for the specter of negative dynamics such as racism. In *Darkwater* Du Bois (1920) describes a similarly unrelenting shadow:

> They do happen. Not on each day, surely not. But now and then—now seldom, now, sudden; now after a week, now in a chain of awful minutes; not everywhere, but anywhere—in Boston, in Atlanta. That's the hell of it. Imagine spending your life

looking for insults or for hiding places from them—shrinking (instinctively and despite desperate bolstering of courage) from blows that are not always but ever; not each day, but each week, each month, each year (p. 223).

According to this theme, the unrelenting nature of racism and related ills means Black men are constantly circumspect in preparation for anticipated discrimination. For these reasons, racial identity is often salient by default.

Like Du Bois (2007b), some respondents recognize the benefits of respectability, hard work, and racial uplift. For Joe, a twenty-two-year-old gay college student:

Being Black is being a person of character, being a person of value, morals, and ethics. Having goals. Being a part of a community that's trying to help its community…living in America you have to work for everything that you have. Nothing comes free. So, being Black is not about being oppressed. It's about being a community. I think that's why I always push myself academically, always, because you can't take my academics away from me. You can say whatever you want about me, call me whatever you want, I have the knowledge to better myself in life.

As espoused by the protagonist Matthew in *Dark Princess*, for Joe, scholastics and self-help foster individual and collective triumph over racism; "Character and brains were too much for prejudice" (Du Bois 1928 [1974], p. 13). Joe's additional comment below suggests that changed mindsets will enable African Americans to reject chronic racism and stereotypes, unite, and negotiate society on their own terms:

We lack that aspect, as African Americans, to stick together, to rely on the fact we went through the same struggles, and we currently are going through those same struggles. So how do we as a people fix our mindset to not dwell on the past, but to prosper to regain that power and respect as a group of people. Because when they look at African Americans, they see monsters or individuals that don't have respect for themselves or respect for one another, or don't have any goals, because society was built on a White foundation…I want my kids to have a better life and a better experience with society than I had.

Despite his own tragic experiences as a Black gay man, Joe's indictment is similar to Du Bois's (1899, 2007a) initial paternalistic strategy where respectability and racial uplift were expected to combat racism. And just as Du Bois encourages Black men to become community and familial leaders, Joe's comment above and the following remark champion a similar goal (Barnes et al., 2014; Du Bois 1899, 1996 [1953]).

For Chauncey, a twenty-three-year-old full-time gay, employed college graduate; "Being a man means taking steps to be the best you. Black men are a brotherhood. We must stay focused. We don't have enough race talk or being aware of community issues." For Chauncey, a race-conscious lens connects his life to those of other Black men and the Black community such that personal traits of race-pride, self-improvement, and responsibility can uplift Blacks as a collective. Moreover, he describes Black masculinity formation processes to counter racism that include vigilance, increased community awareness, and peer support (Johnson 2011; McQueen and Barnes, 2017). The comments above on Black male bonds broadly resonate with Du Bois's (2007a) views about the growing collective consciousness among Blacks to combat race prejudice; "There were among us, but a half-awakened common consciousness, sprung from common joy and grief, at burial, birth or wedding; from a common hardship in poverty, poor land and

low wages; and, above all, from the sight of the Veil that hung between us an Opportunity" (p. 76).

In various ways, Micah, Brad, Logan, Amari, Prince, Joe, and Chauncey each amplify Du Bois's model about Black masculinity by illustrating how they navigate challenges. As in the prior theme, sexual heterogeneity was common. In some instances, Black and African American were used interchangeably; other comments made specific reference to one designation rather than the other. Individuals associated with this theme tend to embrace traits Du Bois links to Black masculinity such as strength, education, hard work, conscientiousness, the importance of the nuclear family, and a protector/provider trope, but regardless of one's sexual identity (Du Bois 1898, 1899, 1974 [1928], 2007a). Yet they emphasize racist experiences and their effects more than negative encounters due to their other social identities. For them, increased knowledge about racism as well as personal and collective agency will help combat this social problem. I also posit that their comments amplify Du Bois's work by illustrating the chronic nature of race prejudice.

Theme 3. Adapting Du Bois: "Self-Reflections and Risk"

Young Black persons associated with this third theme are more apt to discuss their sexual identity as a master status and describe challenges stemming from it rather than other social identities. They describe risks emanating from family, community, or society. Individuals may recognize racism but identify the challenges they face most readily with sexuality. Their experiences and sentiments reflect adaptations of Du Bois's thesis on Black masculinity given that the scholar excluded homosexuals, and thus their experiences, from his thesis. For Du Bois, and unlike respondents here, "Negro problems" are decidedly heterosexual (Carby 2007; Du Bois 2007a; Stewart 2018; Stokes 2007). Per this theme, participants are upending the first sentence in the following Du Boisian remark on sexuality and, following the second sentence to positively reflect their lived experiences: "We are ashamed of sex and we lower our eyes when people will talk of it. We are going to have a real and valuable and eternal judgment only as we make ourselves free of mind, proud of body and just of soul to all men" (Du Bois 1926, p. 297).

According to Monty, a twenty-two-year-old college student, part of his development process around Black masculinity includes reconciling his intersecting social identities and associated challenges:

> Being an African American bisexual man means accepting yourself. No matter how much people disagree with it, it's honestly not their fight. It's your fight. And it's just accepting who you are as a person and then moving forward with that. Because my whole belief is that, at the end of the day, if I accept who I am, people are going to start accepting me. I feel like it starts within first. I want the courage to be more open because I want to build my courage to the point where I'm not afraid to tell my family. Because I feel like once I officially tell them, it's going to be like a weight that's been lifted. And then I feel like I can really be who I wanna be. I feel like right now I'm stuck being who everyone expects me to be. I think about it all the time. I see people coming out, like on social media. They come out to their parents and their parents are accepting. It makes me feel like, 'Why can't I have that?' It just spirals from there. I get so deep into my thoughts that there were times where I became depressed…I desperately want my family's acceptance. Even though I feel like that's a toxic trait of mine, it's still what it is.

For Monty, self-acceptance originates internally; changed attitudes change behavior. Certain difficulties for him are ongoing (i.e., "your fight", "spirals", and depression) and others have yet to be broached (i.e., feeling "stuck" and the "weight" of secrecy). Yet each challenge must be faced with courage. Despite great progress toward self-acceptance, Monty has yet to take the risk to come out to his family as the final step toward liberation (Battle and Bennett, 2005; Bennett 2013; Choi et al., 2011). Akin to aspects of the life of Augustus Dill, descriptions of internal and external risks are central to this theme as well as whether and how individuals are reconciling them (Brooks and Wright, 2021). Similarly, Jeremy, a twenty-seven-year-old healthcare provider, describes the repercussions of hiding his sexuality:

> To be honest, it became a lot. I've suffered from depression. That's why I am so adamant about helping young men who are in my position, dealing with or allowing them to have someone to talk to because I've dealt with it… There were just a lot of factors as to why I came out. I was just tired of being under my mom's thumb. I was tired of making decisions based on if she would walk out of my life or not…So, over the years, I've created a family outside of my own blood. They've always been there…. My sexuality doesn't define who I am. I'm a firm believer in that. I don't believe that you have to be feminine or overly masculine.

In the above remark, Jeremy describes combating depression by taking the risk and coming out to his family, particularly his mother, as well as receiving support from fictive kin. Despite a continued strained relationship with his mother, Jeremy hopes to convince his peers to risk being transparent about their sexual identities to avoid internal trauma. Self-identified as queer, he refuses to privilege a certain social identity over another. In this theme, young persons often grapple with "risk versus reward" decisions linked, minimally, to potentially internal and external trauma and their outcomes (Battle and Bennett, 2005; Brooks and Wright, 2021; Hunter 2010; Jones et al., 2010).

Like Jeremy and Monty, twenty-five-year-old Tate's process of self-reflection is still emerging; "Sometimes it's uncomfortable with how I see myself and how I show up in the world, whether that be coming into my own as far as my sexuality or coming into my own… my interests, how I speak, or how I move through the world. The feeling of people not responding well to that has always been an ever-present fear. I think that as I come here, as I meet new people, as I have new experiences…" Tate's uncomfortability is linked to being a Black gay man and broader fears about body politics. Yet he believes that social support available during prevention program events and continued new encounters in society will help allay such concerns (Balaji et al., 2012; Oster et al., 2013). The response pattern in this theme illustrates tensions as individuals tend to embrace a masculine spectrum as sexual minorities but continue to grapple with what such life choices mean to them, peers, family, and the larger society. Next, Lowell, a twenty-two-year-old college student, wishes he had begun to engage in self-reflection about his multiple identities as a child:

> As a young Black gay man, if you don't understand who you are as a child, not being able to freely express that, those years are kind of hindered because you have to wait until you're an adult to experience and learn what that looks like for you, which I think I still am…. So, learning to love yourself first is something that as a Black/African American gay man you have to do, and then compress those childhood traumas and bullying and oppression and individuals, you know, telling you that you shouldn't be that way. As a child, you're impressionable. So, individuals telling you that you shouldn't be gay, or gay is a sin, [you] start to think of yourself as a bad person and

think that, 'Why am I like this? Should I not be like this?' And then you start to almost assimilate. But those intersectionalities never go anywhere because they're always going to be there.

Lowell continues by detailing when the potential rewards outweighed the risks for him:

So at a point in your life, you have to break those down to almost build yourself back up to who you are as a person….You have those individuals who are African American who ostracize you for being gay, but still [White gay men] ostracize you for being Black. But, at the same time, I can't take away from being Black and being gay because they're still one…Because those experiences can be detrimental mentally, physically, and emotionally. So, being able to have… individuals who see me living in my light and giving them inspiration and power to forget the naysayers and live in their truth, and also know they have other individuals there to fight with them.

In the above remark, Lowell uses Black and African American interchangeably as he summarizes an arduous process of navigating multiple risky situations due to homophobia and/or racism in his family and in the Black and White gay communities. Ultimately, that meant: engaging in self-reflection; dismissing potentially debilitating childhood experiences such as bullying and isolation; questioning inter- and intra-group discrimination; and, working through existential questions. As a result, he has reconciled his intersecting identities (i.e., "they're still one"), is learning to love himself unconditionally, and serves as a role model to other young Black gay men (Hunter 2010; Jones et al., 2010).

Lonnie, an eighteen-year-old college freshman, questions society's need for gender demarcations; "Typically society would view men as being strong, the provider, the caretaker, that whole kinda thing…those things are great, but women can also be those same things, and the stereotypical or typical characteristics of a woman can be applied to a man as well…But for me, I just feel like, you just need to be you and not put up with what society's beliefs and standards are." In contrast to Du Bois's (1898, 1899, 1969 [1908], 1974 [1928], 2007a) tenets about Black masculinity, Lonnie's comment points to gender parity and androgyny. Moreover, he reflects upon attempts to placate his family, depression, and finally, self-acceptance:

That was a long journey, 'cause I believe I knew that I was gay when I was in the sixth grade, so I was probably eleven or twelve. And from then on, it was just like, okay, my family probably won't accept me just from what I've seen, interacting with them and just seeing the media so…I'm gonna keep this a secret until I get to college. That didn't work out. [laughs] So then it was more of like, okay, try to hold that in. Now I'm looking at my mannerisms, how am I going to hold that back? I would walk a certain way…or I would be holding my arms because if I didn't, then my hands would start to flail…Then depression came in…now it's sort of lessened…I'm comfortable in who I am, but, at the same time, I still have to deal with other things.

Further adapting Du Bois (1953), for persons identified in this theme, self-reflection and risk-taking often involve a painful passage of moving beyond subterfuge and fear based on a master status (for Du Bois, race) that is often devalued in society. Lonnie's developmental process around Black masculinity included futile attempts around gender identity and gender performance to "hide" his orientation (i.e., trying to change his mannerism and hand gestures) with debilitating results. Yet self-acceptance does not exempt him from current intra-racial instances of homophobia at college (Means and Jaeger, 2015). This

theme is also distinct because self-reflections among respondents often coincide with challenges to heteronormativity, socially constructed binary identities, gender performance, and the status quo.

As individuals detail risk-taking in their families and the broader society, for some, developing their own perspective on Black masculinity also means challenging expectations in intimate relationships. For example, Henry, a twenty-seven-year-old wellness coordinator, considers intra-group dynamics among his peers that are largely gendered and hierarchical:

> We play roles such as 'top and bottoms.' Because if you are considered the top, they don't consider you to be feminine or all these other things or wear a dress in the club. Or if you're a bottom, they don't expect for you to be looking like a thug with your pants hanging down…, okay, this morning, I have to dress like a dude, or this morning I can't put foundation on, or if I want to go to the club, I can't get my nails done…But now I feel relieved… That don't define a man—whether you're tall or little, short, muscular…You may be fat, but you make sure your family is taken care of—that to me defines a man…We always want to blame other folks, but we also have to remember that it starts with us first…I think that's where we have lost our track…what are your goals in ten years? What are your goals in fifteen years? What is your goal when you get thirty-five? Do you want a house? Do you want to be an executive director? Do you want your own company? That's the things that I look at.

Henry's gender fluidity does not preclude embracing features of a protector/provider motif and other traits such as respectability, the desire for upward mobility, conscientiousness, and self-help included in Du Bois's thesis on Black masculinity (1898, 1899, 1928 [1974], 1961, 2007a, b). Yet he questions the tendency for Black sexual minorities, who are often ostracized in heterosexual spaces, to willingly embrace aspects of heteronormativity such as gendered roles (i.e., "tops and bottoms") that divide and devalue them. Yet Henry also realizes that by questioning these role expectations, he runs the risk of losing viable intimate partners. Henry's comment also illumines some of the nuances of experiences and expectations of embracing a fluid identity on a masculine spectrum that can periodically include feminine dynamics.

The experiences of many individuals like Henry in this theme hearken back to the seemingly unresolved challenges faced by Augustus Dill (Brooks and Wright, 2021; Du Bois 2007a). Most persons are in the process of reconciling their diverse identities in positive ways; others continue to grapple with issues of respectability, identity politics, and society's negative effects on them as sexual beings. Based on the sentiments above by Monty, Jeremy, Tate, Lowell, Lonnie, and Henry, homophobia, stigma and other challenges mean that sexual identity becomes more salient to respondents in this third theme. Some espouse traits linked to a Du Boisian stance on Black masculinity. However, some narratives question heteronormativity and socially constructed binaries as part of a broader process of self-reflection and risk-taking that challenges the status quo in varied dimensions of their lives. In this way, their experiences are illustrative of how Du Bois's work can be adapted to illumine the experiences of a populace he excluded.

Discussion and Conclusion: A New Millennium Du Boisian Mode of Inquiry

Following a NMDMI, this analysis relies on Du Bois's source material to examine the experiences of young Black persons with diverse sexual identities to assess whether and how they espouse tenets about Black masculinity as defined by the scholar's framework. Many of

the study participants self-identify as Black gay males; others espouse sexual identities such as queer, straight, or fluid. This study was not focused on whether or not Du Bois's thesis should have referenced sexual minorities, but rather given that fact, whether its central tenets might still be germane to this populace. Findings from this intra-group study illustrate that Du Bois's thesis about Black masculinity is robust enough to be broadly applicable to their experiences. Although Du Bois does not include Black sexual minorities in his work, many of his views about Black masculinity are reflected in their lives and sentiments. Results here suggest the tendency to adopt, amplify, and/or adapt Du Boisian notions of Black masculinity.

How are their views the same or similar to Du Bois's thesis? Descriptions varied but illustrate the continued salience of positive racial identity as well as experiences and awareness of racism (Du Bois 1985, 2007b). Moreover, Du Bosian tenets associated with Black masculinity such as educational attainment, employment, respectability, a protector/provider trope, self-help, conscientiousness, a strong work ethic, and economic mobility are evident among most respondents (Du Bois 1899, 1969 [1908], 1996 [1953], 2003 [1903], 2007a). In some instances, these traits are associated with masculinity in general; it is most common for individuals to link them to *Black masculinity*. In some respects, this finding is expected; many of these same traits are part of a broader set of expectations and gender performance around masculinity into which many men are generally socialized. This analysis is important because it empirically documents some of these expectations in participants' voices. Also, the salience of such traits for persons here, given the potential influence of their intersecting identities, is noteworthy and illustrates the powerful influence of social forces, the socialization process (Carby 2007; Choi et al., 2011; Ferguson 2004), and present-day manifestations of double consciousness (Du Bois 1996 [1953]).

How do their views differ from Du Bois's framework? Although the above noted traits (some, such as a protector/provider trope, which have been associated with heteronormativity) consistently emerge, individuals appear to have done the hard work to be comfortable about the diverse sexual identities they embrace (Collins 2004; Johnson 2011). In this way, one's self-described sexual identity becomes a "constant" even if views about other topics such as masculinity and race/ethnicity vacillate. This result illustrates how persons may mix and match features of social identities that resonate with their lives (Barnes 2021; Barnes and Collins 2019; Carbado 1999; Hunter 2010). Documenting this pattern illustrates how certain dimensions of one's intersecting identities (e.g., intersections of race, class, gender, and sexuality) can be understood separately and/or hierarchically based on context and lived experiences (Balaji et al., 2012; Barnes 2021; Hunter 2010). Du Bois seemed wedded to a trope that correlated masculinity with heterosexuality. As a Black man, race was clearly embedded in his characterization as well. In contrast, participants in this study often espouse key dimensions of Du Bois's thesis relative to gender and race, while embracing very non-Du Bosian views about sexuality. For example, Augustus Dill's arrest, mental health challenges, and leadership flaws seemed to disqualify him as a Du Boisian model of masculinity (at least based on Du Bois's initial responses) (Carbado et al., 2002; Du Bois 2007a). Such a reductionist view is not apparent among individuals here who, like QOC scholars, appear aware of the existence and potential effects of heteronormativity (Collins 2004; Ferguson 2004). Moreover, applying more recent scholarship positions Dill as a possible exemplar of positive Black masculinity and Black Public Sociology (Brooks and Wright, 2021). These are important findings in this analysis.

Another valuable finding is the emphasis on ethno-racial royalty, racial pride, and a Pan-African identity among certain respondents. The impetus for their symbolism is not Du Boisian, but I contend reflects the spirit of his continued challenge for Negroes to push

back against race prejudice and embrace their heritage and potential (Du Bois 1920, 1953, 1970 [1915]). It appears that these views, in part, emerge as a result of a broader process of challenging societal dictates that attempt to exclude and de-value Black sexual minorities as well as Blacks in general (Balaji et al., 2012; Barnes and Collins, 2019; Battle and Barnett, 2005; Brooks and Wright, 2021; Collins 1990, 2004; Ferguson 2004; Johnson 2011). Furthermore, as Du Bois documented decades ago, respondents in this study describe racist experiences that are often compounded by stereotypes and stigma linked to homophobia (Barnes 2023, 2013; Bennett 2013; Choi et al., 2011; Hunter et al., 2010). As a result, certain persons prioritize their intersecting racial and sexual identities in nuanced ways (Hunter 2010). Yet their experiences, especially for the Black gay men in this study, mean that certain individuals are engaging in broader contemplative processes about risk-taking, transparency, and heteronormativity. For them, being disqualified as Black men using a strict Du Boisian thesis (Carbado et al., 2002) is secondary to living authentic lives. Additionally, a notable number of participants here recount bullying, isolation, and other forms of homophobia that have negative physical and socio-emotional implications for quality of life (Balaji et al., 2012; Collins 1990, 2004; McQueen and Barnes, 2017; Oster et al., 2013). In such cases, whether master statuses emerge and/or vacillate is often dependent on whether young Black sexual minorities encounter stigma, stereotypes—or safe spaces. These results illustrate the importance of Black sexual minorities, their counterparts, as well as people in the larger Black and non-Black populations to help create safe spaces for the former group where their diverse ideas about Black masculinity can emerge unfettered. Allies in families, peer groups, faith communities, and other organizations are challenged to proactively listen to the voices of the young Black people here to help them develop strategies and best practices that foster empowering self-definitions as Black royalty, while simultaneously combating racism and risk in their many forms (Barnes 2023).

It is important to identify study limitations and possibilities for future research. The sample size and lack of randomness as well as its regional focus preclude generalizability of my results beyond the sample and possibly their peers with similar demographic profiles. As noted earlier, generalizability to the broader young Black queer or non-queer communities was not the objective of this study. The specificity of these findings is valuable and the subject warrants additional research. Hopefully these results will encourage replication of this study. Moving forward, it will also be important to query this same diverse population in more detail about possible identity hierarchies, if and how they come about, and what these processes mean in terms of quality of life. More intra-group studies of this type will also help center the experiences of Black sexual minorities, delve deeper into their often complex lives, and help validate their experiences (Kaplan et al., 2016; Young and Meyer, 2005). The topic would also benefit from the voices of transgender persons as well as heterosexual allies for possible comparison voices and narrative heterogeneity. In addition, asking these same questions for a larger, national sample longitudinally would help compare and contrast patterns and experiences more generally as well as assess possible instances and experiences when respondents' views change about Black masculinity formation. More applied work is also needed to continue to develop social policy, strategies, and allies on behalf of this resilient, yet vulnerable population (Balaji et al., 2012). Additionally, scholarship would benefit from expanded research on this topic for sexual minorities in general to examine whether and how common tropes about masculinity and femininity manifest or are questioned. Lastly, I contend that this study benefited from a New Millennium Du Boisian Mode of Inquiry and a substantial sample of young Black people who embrace varied sexual identities. More efforts are needed to revisit Du Bois's work and consider its potential relevance across varied scholarly settings and for diverse populations.

Notes

1 Some people consider African Americans a subgroup within the larger Black community. Other persons make distinctions between the former group as an ethnic designation and the latter as a racial designation. Rather than debate the issue, in this study, Black and African American are used interchangeably to refer to persons of African descent in the Diaspora by this writer unless otherwise noted. However, specific references to Black and/or African American are used purposefully when quoting respondents. White and European American are used interchangeably as well. Black and White are also capitalized throughout the study.

2 For example, the "A" can also represent "allies, aromantic, and/or agender". The overall concept focuses on inclusivity and the validity of various social identities.

3 "Negro" is used when it parallels Du Bois's terminology.

4 Scholars posit that Du Bois's impressiveness of Cullen as an archetype of Black heterosexual masculinity caused him to ignore the latter's homosexuality and arrange a marriage to his own daughter Yolanda as a solution to the "problem" (Du Bois 2007a; Stokes 2007).

5 The program was funded via a five-year grant (2015-2019) from the Department of Health and Human Services: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). The program was housed at a small liberal arts university in the South. Due to the timing of birthdays and/or continued participation in the five-year program, a small group of participants were over the age of twenty-four years old when interviewed.

6 The grant goal is to interview all 168 past participants. This analysis includes follow-up interviews collected thus far from January–June 2019 (75% face-to-face and 25% via telephone). Individuals participated based on their availability and received a $25 gift card.

7 This category includes trade and technical schools.

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Sandra L. Barnes is the C. V. Starr Professor and Chair in the Dept. of Sociology at Brown University. Her research and teaching areas include: Sociology of Religion, inequality, gender/sexuality, urban sociology, and African American studies. Dr. Barnes received a BS degree (1986) in mathematics and economics from Fisk University in Nashville, TN. She also earned Master's degrees from Georgia Institute of Technology (1989) and the Interdenominational Theological Center (1995) and a PhD (1999) in Sociology from Georgia State University, Atlanta, GA. Some of her book publications include: *Kings of Mississippi: Race, Religious Education, and the Making of a Middle Class Black Family in the Segregated South* (Cambridge University Press 2019) and *Live Long and Prosper: How Black Megachurches Address HIV/AIDS and Poverty in the Age of Prosperity Theology* (Fordham University Press 2013). Her most recent book is *From Jesus to J-Setting: Religious and Sexual Fluidity among Black Young People* (University of Georgia Press 2023). Barnes' articles have been published in *SOCIAL FORCES, Social*

Problems, *Journal of African American Studies*, and *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*. Her 2018 Emmy-nominated documentary, "Gary, Indiana: A Tale of Two Cities," examines the influence of Black churches in poor urban spaces. Phi Beta Kappa, her record includes: 9 books; 3 edited volumes; over 65 peer-reviewed articles; 10 book chapters; and PI or Co-PI on grants totaling over $2.5 million dollars.